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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their April 9 news coverage on the speculation that incumbent Soochow University President Liu Chao-shiuan will be appointed as the next premier; on the upcoming Boao Forum hosted by China; on the international torch relay for the Beijing Games; and on a controversial personnel arrangement in the state-run Taiwan Power Company. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" devoted more than half of its page six to discussing the two U.S. aircraft carrier combat groups that are currently cruising the waters around the Taiwan Strait until late May and the significance of such a move.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "China Times" analysis said the deployment of the U.S. aircraft carrier combat groups in the Taiwan Strait was aimed at "double deterrence" against both sides of the Taiwan Strait. An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed the upcoming Boao Forum, in which Vice President-elect Vincent Siew is expected to meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao. The article said it is Hu, not Siew, who should feel worried about Taiwan's status at the forum. An editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" urged President-elect Ma Ying-jeou not to lose himself in the applause and thus put Taiwan's security and sovereignty in danger. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed the "1992 consensus" and said what really matters is whether Beijing is sincere in putting the consensus into practice. End summary.

A) "[During the Period of Taiwan's] Power Transition, the United States Is Exercising Double Deterrence to Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait"

Journalist Wu Ming-chieh noted in an analysis in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (4/9):

"Ever since the tension across the Taiwan Strait in 1996, the U.S. military has always dispatched its aircraft carriers to 'pass through' the neighboring waters of Taiwan whenever Taiwan held its presidential or other key elections or during the transition of power in 2000. But never has the United States directly sent two of its carrier battle groups to 'linger' in the waters north and south of Taiwan, respectively, as it is doing now starting from Taiwan's presidential election until the transition of power in May. The aircraft carriers are expected to stay near the Taiwan Strait for as long as two months. Such a move by the United States is perhaps not simply aimed at 'protecting Taiwan' but has also turned into 'double deterrence' against both sides of the Taiwan Strait. ...

"Even though Washington and Beijing have worked to deepen their military exchanges over the past few years, when it comes to maintaining stability across the Taiwan Strait, the U.S. military still tends to 'say one thing while doing another' and adopt a 'communicating while deterring' pattern with China, as both sides continue to have conflicting views and lack mutual trust. The biggest change [during these few years] was that the U.S. military

used to take Taiwan's side and thus dispatch its aircraft carriers to 'protect Taiwan.' But in fear that the Bian administration might proactively plot to stir up cross-Straits conflicts for its own political gains, the U.S. military has instead changed its strategy and sent its carriers to also 'stop Taiwan.' The U.S. strategy has been changed into 'double deterrence' to intimidate Beijing and Taipei at the same time.

"As a result, the unprecedented move by the U.S. military to send two U.S. carrier battle groups to continue cruising the Taiwan Strait indicates that in addition to warning Beijing, Washington does not trust Taiwan either. Taiwan must keep vigilant, and when the new administration comes to power, it surely has to accelerate its pace in mending its relations with Washington so as to readjust and shorten the distance between Taipei and Washington in the triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei."

B) "It is Hu Jintao Who Should Feel Concerned"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] editorialized (4/9):

"... In fact, Beijing will suffer more pressure than Taipei on occasions like the Boao Forum, as any words or deeds by Beijing deliberately to belittle Taiwan will only manifest China's ugly face of bullying the weak under the international spotlight. Such moves will not only be childish and boring but will also help Taiwan win more sympathy [from the international community] and extinguish the Taiwan people's expectations for [improved] cross-Straits relations. All the more, they will be akin to helping redeem the notorious line adopted by Chen Shui-bian and slapping Ma Ying-jeou hard in the face. [Should that happen], the KMT's moderate cross-Straits policy will go bankrupt even before the Ma-Siew ticket takes the helm. Can such a development possibly be the situation that Hu Jintao hopes to see? ...

"On this aspect, probably no one will ever doubt the goodwill gesture extended by Taiwan's new government. Thus, it will be China, not Taiwan, which will be tested at the Boao Forum. It will not be Taiwan's status but Beijing's image of a great nation, which will be disparaged. At this moment, it is Hu who should feel nervous. How is it possible that it is Ma, Siew or the Taiwan people who are so worried?"

C) "Ma Ying-jeou Must Not Lose Himself in the Applause and Thus Put Taiwan's Security and Sovereignty in Danger"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (4/9):

"... Ma Ying-jeou has engaged himself in the wishful thinking that China will offer a panacea for [cross-Straits relations], and in order to get such magic potion, he is willing to bow low and humiliate himself in every possible way by announcing the '1992 consensus' and that 'Chinese Taipei is the best name for Taiwan to apply to enter the World Health Organization.' Ma is yet to assume his presidency, but he has started saying these things and restoring sinification on the island, in an attempt to undo the DPP's efforts towards nativism over the past eight years. Recently, [Ma] even allowed Vice President-elect Vincent Siew to attend the Boao Forum hosted by China and meet with [Chinese President] Hu Jintao by disparaging himself as an ordinary civilian and sending to the world the wrong signal - that Taiwan is not an independent nation. Such a series of concessions, be it the recognition of the '1992 consensus' or addressing Taiwan as 'Chinese Taipei,' are aimed at...breaking the cross-Straits deadlock in the hope of resuming talks to acknowledge substantively the 'one China' principle and denying Taiwan's status as an independent sovereign nation ..."

D) "First China Must Keep Its Promises"

Lin Chia, an independent commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (4/9):

"... Whether Chinese leaders verbally agree with 'one China' with each side having its own interpretation is not important. What matters is whether Beijing is sincere in putting it into practice.

This is something that can be verified as soon as Ma takes office. ... KMT legislators should give Ma and the Chinese government a chance to put the 'one China, different interpretations' framework into practice. If Beijing is willing to sign a mutual and equal currency-clearing agreement that does not limit Taiwan's rights or marginalize Taiwan or its currency, then it would truly be a master stroke and a blow against the Taiwanese independence movement. The Taiwanese independence discourse would need to be adjusted.

"But if Beijing only makes exploitative demands about an agreement's preconditions, structure and content, then the Ma government, pan-blue legislators, and voters will not need to entertain any illusions about its idea of "one China with each side having its own interpretation."

YOUNG